

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BONN

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INFO AMCONSUL BREMEN

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, GW, PINT

SUBJECT: BIEDENKOPF VERSUS TRADE UNIONS

REF: BONN 15277

SUMMARY: DGB UNIONS HAVE REACTED TO CDU SECRETARY GENERAL BIEDENKOPF'S RECENT CHARGES OF ABUSES OF UNION POWER WITH A FLURRY OF COURT INJUNCTIONS AND DENIALS. THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT THE DGB WISHES TO PLAY DOWN THE ISSUE. DGB PRESIDENT VETTER DECLARED A FEW DAYS AFTER THE DGB'S SEPTEMBER 8 MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD THAT THE DGB WOULD COOPERATE WITH ANY DEMOCRATICALLY ELECTED GOVERNMENT, AND THAT A CDU/CSU LED GOVERNMENT AFTER THE ELECTIONS WOULD NOT NECESSARILY MEAN THE END OF SOCIAL PEACE IN THE FRG. HELMUT KOHL HAS ACCEPTED VETTER'S DECLARATION, INDICATING HIS DESIRE TO AVOID A DIRECT CONFRONTATION WITH THE DGB TOP LEADERSHIP. THE VETTER-KOHL PUBLIC EXCHANGE SHOULD HELP TO EASE TENSIONS BETWEEN THE DGB AND THE CDU IN THE FINAL PHASE OF THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN. END SUMMARY

1. AT A PRESS CONFERENCE SEPTEMBER 3, CDU SECRETARY GENERAL KURT BIEDENKOPF PRESENTED 22 CASES WHICH HE CLAIMED SHOWED THAT LOCAL DGB TRADE UNIONISTS AND FUNCTIONARIES, OPENLY OR INDIRECTLY, WERE TAKING SIDES WITH THE SPD. ACCORDING TO BIEDENKOPF, THEY WERE THUS ABUSING TRADE UNION POWER AND VIOLATING THE IDEA OF THE UNIFIED TRADE UNION MOVEMENT (EMBRACING SPD AND CDU TRADE UNIONISTS). SPECIFICALLY, HE CHARGED:

A) THE ABUSE OF TRADE UNION POWER IN FAVOR OF THE SPD;

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B) POLITICALLY-MOTIVATED DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CDU MEMBERS AND NON-PARTISANS BY DGB TRADE UNIONISTS; AND,

C) INADMISSIBLE PRESSURE BY DGB UNION FUNCTIONARIES ON UNORGANIZED WORKERS OR THOSE ORGANIZED IN NON-DGB UNIONS.

THE CASES INVOLVED THE DGB MINE AND ENERGY WORKERS,
METALWORKERS AND CHEMICAL WORKERS UNIONS, MOSTLY IN
THE RUHR AREA.

2. BIEDENKOPF PRODUCED DOCUMENTATION THAT LOCAL
UNION ORGANIZATIONS ARE SUPPORTING SPD SPONSORED
ELECTION RALLIES THROUGH LEAFLETS, INVITATIONS TO
SPD ELECTION SPEAKERS, DISTRIBUTION OF SPD PROPAGANDA
MATERIAL AND PAYMENT OF CASH COMPENSATION TO SPD
RALLY PARTICIPANTS FROM TRADE UNION FUNDS. SOME DGB
TRADE UNIONISTS ALLEGEDLY ABUSED THEIR FULL-TIME
POSITION AS WORK COUNSELORS TO PREPARE SPD ELECTION
RALLIES. BIEDENKOPF SAID THAT WHEN THE CDU FIRST TOOK
UP THE QUESTION OF AN ABUSE OF SOCIAL POWER, IT WAS
SWAMPED BY COMPLAINTS. IN THE RUHR AREA ALONE HUNDREDS
OF PEOPLE SHOWED UP IN A FEW DAYS TO COMPLAIN ABOUT
DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES AND PRESSURE EXERTED BY LOCAL
UNION ORGANIZATIONS.

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3. TO STRESS THE CLOSE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UNIONS AND THE SPD AND THE ACCUMULATION OF OFFICES IN THE HANDS OF ONE PERSON, BIEDENKOPF REFERRED TO THE EXAMPLE OF ADOLF SCHMIDT, THE PRESIDENT OF THE DGB UNION FOR MINING AND ENERGY WHO, AT THE SAME TIME, HOLDS OFFICES AS VICE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE RUHR COAL MINING COMPANY, VICE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE GOVERNMENT-OWNED VEBA CORPORATION AND HARPENER AG, MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF VARIOUS OTHER COMPANIES SUCH AS THE UNION-OWNED "NEUE HEIMAT" HOUSING CORPORATION AND BANK FUER GEMEINWIRTSCHAFT (UNION BANK); SCHMIDT IS ALSO AN SPD BUNDESTAG DEPUTY, VICE CHAIRMAN OF THE SPD BUNDESTAG FACTION, MEMBER OF THE SPD TRADE UNION COUNCIL AND CO-PUBLISHER OF AN SPD ELECTION MAGAZINE.

4. SPD AND UNION REACTION TO BIEDENKOPF'S CHARGES HAS BEEN VEHEMENT. METALWORKERS UNION PRESIDENT EUGEN

LODERER ANNOUNCED A CAREFUL LEGAL EXAMINATION OF THE DOCUMENTATION AND A LEGAL SUIT AGAINST BIEDENKOPF. THE MINEWORKERS UNION REQUESTED AND OBTAINED COURT INJUNCTIONS ON SOME SPECIFIC CASES PROHIBITING THE REITERATION OF CHARGES LISTED IN THE DOCUMENTATION. BIEDENKOPF HAS REPLIED THAT THE INJUNCTIONS WERE BASED ON SOME MINOR TECHNICAL ERRORS WHICH DID NOT AFFECT THE SUBSTANCE AND THAT THE FACTS WOULD BE PROVEN IN THE FORTHCOMING COURT PROCEEDINGS. THE SPD SAID THAT THE CHARGES WERE RIDICULOUS AND DESIGNED TO RESTRICT THE FREEDOM OF ACTION OF THE TRADE UNIONS.

5. THE DGB LEADERSHIP SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN DIVIDED OVER THE ISSUE. FIVE DAYS AFTER BIEDENKOPF'S PRESENTATION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OF HIS DOCUMENTATION (SEPT 8), THE DGB ISSUED A STATEMENT SAYING THAT, AFTER A FIRST EXAMINATION OF THE ALLEGED VIOLATIONS, BIEDENKOPF'S UNSCRUPULOUS ACTION "IS NOT JUSTIFIED". IT POINTED OUT THAT THE UNIONS UNDER ATTACK WILL EXAMINE BIEDENKOPF'S CHARGES AND PUBLISH THE RESULT BEFORE THE ELECTIONS. THE DGB EMPHASIZED THAT NO RESPONSIBLE POLITICIAN CAN IGNORE THE FACT THAT THE UNIFIED TRADE UNIONS, THEIR FUNCTIONARIES AND THE WORK COUNCILS HAVE DECISIVELY CONTRIBUTED TO THE FREEDOM AND PROSPERITY OF THE PEOPLE IN THE FRG.

6. THERE WERE, HOWEVER, PRESS REPORTS REFLECTING THE UNIONS' DESIRE TO PLAY DOWN THE ISSUE. METALWORKERS UNION PRESIDENT LODERER DECLARED AFTER THE DGB EXECUTIVE SESSION THAT THE MATERIAL PRESENTED BY BIEDENKOPF HAD LITTLE SUBSTANCE AND WAS NOT WORTH WHILE TO FILE A LAW SUIT. CHEMICAL WORKERS UNION PRESIDENT HAUENSCHILD DECLARED THAT THE CHARGES WHICH HAD BEEN KNOWN FOR QUITE A WHILE WERE "IRRELEVANT". OTHER UNION LEADERS HAVE MENTIONED THAT THE DGB EXECUTIVE BOARD HAD OTHER MORE IMPORTANT ISSUES TO DISCUSS THAN BIEDENKOPF.

7. IN AN INTERVIEW IN "DER SPIEGEL", RELEASED ON SEPT 11, DGB PRESIDENT VETTER CLARIFIED THAT DGB WOULD SUPPORT ANY FREELY ELECTED GOVERNMENT. HE SAID HE AND DGB WERE AWARE THAT A CDU/CSU VICTORY WOULD NOT AUTOMATICALLY MEAN THE END OF THE FRG'S RECENT HISTORY OF SOCIAL PEACE. CDU'S HELMUT KOHL QUICKLY PICKED UP VETTER'S CONCILIATORY STATEMENT AND ACKNOWLEDGED HIS DESIRE TO AVOID A POLARIZATION.

8. COMMENT: BIEDENKOPF TOOK HIS ACTION WITHOUT

CONSULTING WITH LEADING CDU TRADE UNIONISTS. THEY WERE EMBARRASSED BY THE STRONG REACTION OF THEIR SPD COLLEAGUES AND THEREFORE WERE MAKING EFFORTS TO CALM DOWN EMOTIONS. CDU FULL-TIME OFFICIALS IN THE DGB NECESSARILY HAVE TO PROTECT THEIR OWN INTERESTS. NORBERT BLUEM, CHAIRMAN OF THE CDU SOCIAL COMMITTEES IN RHINELAND-PALATINATE, A PROMINENT CDU LABOR LEADER, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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EXPLAINED THAT THE CDU IS NOT CONDUCTING AN ELECTION CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE TRADE UNIONS, BUT AGAINST THEIR "BLINDNESS IN POLITICAL ISSUES".

9. THE BIEDENKOPF STRATEGY CONTAINS OBVIOUS RISKS. BY TAKING ON THE POWERFUL GERMAN TRADE UNIONS HE RUNS THE DANGER OF CREATING A POLITICAL BACKLASH IN THE TRADE UNIONS AND THE SPD. GIVEN THE LACKLUSTER PERFORMANCE OF THE SPD IN THE CAMPAIGN, IT MIGHT WELL BE BEST FOR THE CDU IF THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS WERE LEFT

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QUIESCENT. BIEDENKOPF DEBATES THIS POINT, HOWEVER, CLAIMING HE HAS NOT MOBILIZED THE SPD. AN EXAMPLE OF THEIR RELUCTANCE TO MAKE THESE CHARGES A CENTRAL ISSUE IN THE CAMPAIGN, ACCORDING TO BIEDENKOPF, IS THAT THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS HAVE NOT USED THEIR SPECIAL ELECTION NEWSPAPER PUBLISHED EACH SUNDAY IN THE RUHR TO REPLY TO HIS CHARGES.

10. BIEDENKOPF'S RUHR STRATEGY IS DESIGNED TO MOBILIZE CDU MEMBERS AND SYMPATHIZERS. IN THE PAST, CDU MEMBERS IN THE RUHR WERE RELUCTANT TO PARTICIPATE TOO ACTIVELY IN RUHR ELECTION CAMPAIGNS BECAUSE OF FEAR OF OSTRACISM AND RETALIATION IN THIS HEAVY SPD AREA. BIEDENKOPF HAS DONE A LOT TO CHANGE THIS AND HE DRAWS LARGE AND ENTHUSIASTIC CROWDS WHEREVER HE GOES. HE FEELS THAT

IN CONFRONTING THE TRADE UNIONS, HE CAN ENCOURAGE
CDU SYMPATHIZERS TO STAND UP AND BE COUNTED. IN
ADDITION, HE FEELS THAT HIS CAMPAIGN WILL APPEAL TO
THE UNDECIDED VOTER NOT ONLY IN THE RUHR BUT ALSO
THROUGHOUT NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA. TO DO THIS, HE IS
CARRYING ON AN AGGRESSIVE AND EXHAUSTING CAMPAIGN,
SPEAKING AT UP TO TEN RALLIES A DAY. IF NOTHING ELSE,
HE HAS MADE HIMSELF WELL-KNOWN AND HE IS NOW CONSIDERED
A POLITICIAN (NOT JUST A BRILLIANT, BEHIND-THE-SCENES
MANAGER) WHO WILL HAVE TO BE RECKONED WITH IN THE
FUTURE.
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